

**ROBERT  
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BALLANTYNE**

THE NORSEMEN IN THE  
WEST

Robert Michael Ballantyne

**The Norsemen in the West**

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# **R. M. Ballantyne**

## **The Norsemen in the West**

### **Chapter One.**

#### **The Norsemen in the West; Or America before Columbus. The Curtain Rises and the Play Begins**

One fine autumn evening, between eight and nine hundred years ago, two large hairy creatures, bearing some resemblance to polar bears, might have been seen creeping slowly, and with much caution, toward the summit of a ridge that formed a spur to one of the ice-clad mountains of Greenland. The creatures went on all-fours. They had long bodies, short legs, shorter tails, and large round heads.

Having gained the top of the ridge they peeped over and beheld a hamlet nestled at the foot of a frowning cliff; and at the head of a smiling inlet. We use these terms advisedly, because the cliff, being in deep shadow, looked unusually black and forbidding, while the inlet, besides being under the influence of a profound calm, was lit up on all its dimples by the rays of the setting sun.

The hamlet consisted of one large cottage and half a dozen small cots, besides several sheds and enclosures wherein were a few sleepy-looking sheep, some lean cattle, and several half-starved horses. There was active life there also. Smoke issued from the chimneys; fresh-looking women busied themselves about household work; rosy children tumbled in and out at the doors, while men in rough garments and with ruddy countenances mended nets or repaired boats on the shore. On a bench in front of the principal cottage sat a sturdy man, scarcely middle-aged, with shaggy fair and flowing locks. His right foot served as a horse to a rapturous little boy, whose locks and looks were so like to those of the man that their kinship was obvious—only the man was rugged and rough in exterior; the boy was round and smooth. Tow typified the hair of the man; floss silk that of the boy.

Everything in and around the hamlet bore evidence of peace and thrift. It was a settlement of Norsemen—the *first* Greenland settlement, established by Eric the Red of Iceland about the year 986—nearly twenty years before the date of the opening of our tale—and the hairy creatures above referred to had gone there to look at it.

Having gazed very intently over the ridge for a considerable time, they crept backwards with extreme caution, and, on getting sufficiently far down the hill-side to be safe from observation, rose on their hind-legs and began to talk; from which circumstance it may be concluded that they were human beings. After talking, grinning, and glaring at each other for a few minutes, with gestures to correspond, as though on the point of engaging in mortal combat, they suddenly wheeled about and walked off at a rapid pace in the direction of a gorge in the mountains, the head of which was shut in by and filled up with cliffs and masses and fields of ice that overtopped the everlasting hills, and rested like a white crest on the blue sky. Vast though it seemed, this was merely a tongue of those great glaciers of the mysterious North which have done, and are still doing, so much to modify the earth's economy and puzzle antiquarian philosophy; which form the fountain-head of influences that promote the circulation of the great deep, and constitute the cradle of those ponderous icebergs that cover the arctic seas.

From out that gloomy gorge a band of more than a hundred hairy creatures issued with wild shouts and upraised arms to welcome back the adventurous two. They surrounded them, and forthwith the nation—for the entire nation was evidently there—held a general assembly or parliament on the spot. There was a good deal of uproar and confusion in that parliament, with occasional attempts on the part of several speakers to obtain a hearing at one and the same time—in which respects

this parliament bore some resemblance to civilised assemblies of the present day. There was also an immense amount of gesticulation and excitement.

At last there uprose a man clad in garments that had once belonged to a seal, and with a face that was quite as round and nearly as flat as a frying-pan. He stood fully half a foot higher than the tallest of his fellows. Like the adventurous two he had a tail—a very short tail—to his coat; but indeed this might be said of all the men of the tribe. The women's tails, however, were long. Perhaps this was meant as a mark of distinction, for their costume was so very similar to that of the men that their smaller size and longer tails alone marked the difference. To be sure there was additional presumptive evidence of their sex in the fact that most of them carried babies in their hoods; which hoods were made preposterously large for the express purpose of containing the babies.

To the tall man with the flat face the assembly listened with eager looks, bated breath, and open mouths. What he said—who can tell? His language was unintelligible to civilised ears. Not so, however, his actions, which were vigorous and full of meaning, and comprehensible by all nations. If there be any significance in signs at all he began by saying, “Hold your stupid tongues and *I* will speak.” This drew forth loud and prolonged applause—as consummate impudence usually does. When he pointed with both hands to the women and children, and spoke in tender tones, instantly thereafter growling in his speech, gnashing his teeth, glaring fiercely, waving one hand at the surrounding hills and shaking the other, clenched, at the unoffending sea—he was obviously stating his grievances, namely, that the white men had come there to wrest from him his native hills and glaciers, and rob him of his wife and children, and that he defied them to come on and do their worst, seeing that, in regard to the whole assembled white world in arms he did not care a button—or a walrus-tusk, for buttons were unknown to these creatures at that time. When, suddenly changing his manner and tone, he seized a spear, hissed his sentiments through his teeth with great volubility, and made a furious plunge that caused the assembly to gasp, and the man nearest the spear point to shrivel up—what *could* be his meaning save that nothing short of a hole right through the body of a Norseman could appease the spirit of indignation that caused his blood to boil? And when, finally, he pointed to the setting sun, traced a line with his finger from it downward to the centre of the earth under his feet, then shook his spear wrathfully toward the sea and wound up with a tremendous Ho! that would have startled the echoes of the place had there been any there, it was plain to the meanest capacity that an attack—impetuous and overwhelming—was to be made on the strangers at midnight.

Whatever were his sentiments, the assembly heartily appreciated, applauded, and approved them. They cheered and shouted “Hear, hear,” after their own fashion, and then the whole band rushed back into the mountain gorge,—doubtless with the intent to gorge themselves with raw blubber, prepare their weapons, and snatch a little repose before issuing forth to battle.

But let us return to the Norsemen, over whose innocent heads such awful prospects were impending.

The sturdy man with the fair shaggy locks was Leif, the son of Eric the Red of Iceland. The boy with the silken curls, who rode on his foot so joyously, was his son Olaf.

Eric had died several years before the date on which our tale opens, and Leif inherited his cottage and property at Brattalid in Ericsfiord, on the west coast of Greenland—the hamlet which we have already described.

“Come now, Olaf,” said Leif, flinging the child from his foot to his knee, and thence to the ground, “give me your hand; we shall go see how the boats and nets get on.—Hey! there goes a puff of wind. We shall have more presently.” He paused and scanned the seaward horizon with that intent abstracted gaze which is peculiar to seafaring men. So long did he gaze, and so earnestly, that the child looked up in his face with an expression of surprise, and then at the horizon, where a dark blue line indicated the approach of a breeze.

“What do you see, father?” asked Olaf.

“Methinks I see two ships,” replied Leif.



At this there came a sweet musical voice from the cottage:— “Ships, brother! Did I not tell you that I had a dream about two ships, and said I not that I was sure something was going to happen?”

The speaker appeared in the doorway, drying her hands and arms on a towel,—for she had been washing dishes. She was a fair comely young woman, with exceedingly deep blue eyes, and a bright colour in her cheeks,—for women of the richer class were remarkably healthy and well-made in those days. They did a great deal of hard work with their hands, hence their arms were strong and well developed without losing anything of their elegance.

“You are always dreaming, widow Gudrid,” said Leif, with a quiet smile,—for he was no believer in dreams or superstitions, in which respect he differed much from the men and women of his time; “nevertheless, I am bound to admit that you did tell me that ‘something’ was going to happen, and no one can deny that something *is* about to occur just now. But your dream happened a month or six weeks ago, and the ‘something,’ which you are pleased to assume is these two ships, is only happening to-day. See, now, I can be a more definite prophet than thou: I will prophesy that Yule is coming,—and it will surely come if you only wait long enough!”

“You are an unbeliever, brother-in-law,” retorted Gudrid, with a laugh; “but I have not time to reason with you. These ships will bring strangers, and I must prepare to show them hospitality.—Come, Olaf, help me to put the house in order.”

Thus summoned, Olaf followed Gudrid into the house with alacrity, for he was passionately fond of his pretty aunt, who stood in the place of a mother to him, his own mother having died when he was an infant.

“But, aunt,” said Olaf, checking himself in the doorway and looking wistfully back, “I want to see the ships come in.”

“You shall see that, my son; I will not keep you too long.”

This was quite sufficient. Olaf thoroughly believed in his aunt’s truthfulness and wisdom. He set to work to assist in clearing away the confusion—part of which, in the shape of toys and chips—was of his own creating—and became so busy that he almost forgot the ships—at least if he did remember them they did not weigh heavily on his mind.

“Now, Olaf,” said Gudrid, going to the window when the preparations were nearly completed, “you may run down to the shore, for the ships will soon be on the strand.”

The boy waited no second bidding, you may be sure. He flew out of the house, and to his great surprise beheld the two ships—which so lately had appeared like sea-birds on the horizon—coming grandly up the fiord, their great square sails bulging out before a smart breeze.

All the men of the little colony were assembled on the shore—all, at least, who chanced to be at home at the time; but many of the inhabitants were absent—some fishing, some gone to Iceland, and others on viking-cruise. There were probably about thirty men on the sands, besides a good many women and children.

It must not be supposed, however, that this was the whole of that Greenland colony. It was only the part of it that had settled at Brattalid in Ericsfiord. There was another portion, a few miles distant, named Heriulfness, nearly as large as that of Ericsfiord, which had been founded by Heriulf a friend and companion of Eric the Red. Heriulf had soon followed his friend Eric to the grave, leaving the management of the colony of Heriulfness to his son Biarne.

Biarne had not been present when the two sails were first observed, but he chanced to come over to Brattalid just before their arrival.

“What, ho! Biarne,” shouted Leif, as the son of Heriulf went down to the beach, “come up hither.”

Leif stood on an elevated rock apart, and Biarne, a good deal excited, went up to him.

“Why, what ails thee?” asked Leif.

“Nothing,” replied Biarne, “but I think I know whose ship that first one is.”

“Ay! is it the ship of a friend or a foe?”

“A friend,” replied Biarne—“at least he was a friend when I knew him in Norway, nigh twenty summers past, and I did not think him changeable. You and I, Leif, have often sailed these northern seas together and apart, but I do not think that in all our wanderings either of us has met before or since a finer man than Karlsefin, though he was a mere stripling when I knew him.”

The Norseman’s eyes flashed as he spoke of his friend, for, besides being a strong and handsome man, he possessed a warm enthusiastic heart. Indeed, he had been noted in the settlement for the strength of his affection for his father Heriulf, and his dutiful conduct towards him as long as the old man lived.

“Karlsefin,” repeated Leif, musing; “I know him not.”

“Yet he knows you,” said Biarne; “when I met him in Norway I told him all about your discovery of Vinland.”

“Nay, thine own discovery of it,” said Leif.

“Not so,” replied the other, with a blush, in which a frown mingled; “I did but look upon the land—you went ashore and took possession.”

“Well, if I did so I have not retained it,” replied Leif, with a laugh; “but say, how know you that this is Karlsefin’s ship?”

“I know by the cut of her figure-head and the colour of her sails. Karlsefin was always partial to stripes of white and blue.”

“Well, it may be as you say; we shall soon know.” Thus saying, Leif descended to the beach as the vessels approached and ran their keels straight on the sandy shores of the bay. There was great bustle on board, and there were many men, besides some women, who could be seen looking over the bulwarks with keen interest, while Leif’s men brought planks with which to make a gangway from the ship to the shore.

The ships which had thus come to Greenland were of the quaint build peculiar to the Norse vessels of those days—a peculiarity of build, by the way, which has not altogether disappeared, for to this day the great central mast, huge square sail, and high prow may be seen in the fiords of Norway.

Each of the vessels which now lay beached in Ericsfiord had a high forecastle and poop, with figure-heads on stem and stern-posts that towered higher still. The ships were only half-decked, with benches for numerous rowers, and each had a crew of sixty men.

When the gangway was laid to the leading ship the first man who descended to the shore was of striking appearance. It was not so much that he was tall and strong enough to have been a worthy foeman to the stoutest colonist in Ericsfiord, as that his demeanour was bland and courtly, while there was great intellectuality in his dark handsome countenance. Unlike most Norsemen, his hair and beard were black and close-curling, and his costume, though simple, was rich in quality.

The moment he landed, Biarne stepped forward, exclaiming, “Karlsefin!”

The stranger’s face lighted up with surprise and pleasure.

“Biarne!” he said, seizing his hand, “I thought you were in Iceland.”

“So I was, but now I am in Greenland, and right glad to be the first to welcome my friend.”

Hereupon the two shook hands fervently; but, not content with this, they seized each other in an embrace, and their bearded mouths met with a hearty masculine smack that did credit to their hearts, and which it might have gratified the feelings of an affectionate walrus to behold.



## Chapter Two.

### Strong Emotions are Succeeded by Supper, and Followed by Discussions on Discovery, which End in a Wild Alarm!

When Karlsefin had been introduced to Leif Ericsson, the former turned round and presented to him and Biarne his friend Thorward, the captain of the other ship. Thorward was not a tall man, but was very broad and stout, and had a firm yet pleasing cast of countenance. Both Thorward and Karlsefin were men of about thirty-five years of age.

“Are you not on viking-cruise?” asked Leif as they walked up to the house together, while the male members of his household and the men of the settlement assisted the crews to moor the ships.

“No; my friend Thorward and I are not men of war. We prefer the peaceful occupation of the merchant, and, to say truth, it is not unprofitable.”

“I would that more were of your way of thinking,” said Leif. “I do not love the bloody game of war, and glad am I that we have got into a quiet corner here in Greenland, where there is small occasion for it. Biarne, too, is of our way of thinking, as no doubt you already know.”

“He has often told me so, and, if I mistake not, has feathered his nest well by merchanting.”

“He has,” answered Biarne for himself, with a laugh.

While they thus advanced, talking, little Olaf had kept walking in front of the tall stranger, looking up into his face with unbounded admiration. He had never before seen any man so magnificent. His father and Biarne, whom he had hitherto regarded as perfect specimens of mankind, were quite eclipsed. Looking backward and walking forward is an unsafe process at any time. So Olaf found it on the present occasion, for he tripped over a stone and in falling hit his little nose with such violence that it soon became a big nose, and bled profusely.

Karlsefin picked him up and set him on his legs. “My poor boy, don’t cry,” he said.

“No fear of *him* crying,” observed Leif; “he never cries,—save when his feelings are hurt. When you touch these he *is* addicted to blubbering.—Run, lad, and Gudrid will wash you.”

Olaf bounded into the house, where he was carried off to a sleeping-room and there carefully sponged by the sympathetic Gudrid. “Oh!—” he exclaimed, while his face was being washed.

“Does it pain you much, dear?” said the pretty aunt, interrupting him.

“Oh!” he continued, enthusiastically, “I never did see such a splendid man before.”

“What splendid man, child?”

“Why, Karlsefin.”

“And who is Karlsefin?”

“The stranger who has come across the sea from Norway.”

“Indeed,” said Gudrid.

Whether it was the sound of the stranger’s voice in the adjoining room, or anxiety to complete her hospitable preparations, that caused Gudrid to bring her operations on Olaf to an abrupt termination, we cannot tell, but certain it is that she dried him rather quickly and hastened into the outer hall, where she was introduced to the two strangers in due form as widow Gudrid.

She had no difficulty in distinguishing which was Olaf’s “splendid man!” She looked at Karlsefin and fell in love with him on the spot, but Gudrid was modest, and not sentimental. It is only your mawkishly sentimental people who are perpetually tumbling into love, and out of it, and can’t help showing it. Cupid shot her right through the heart with one powerful dart, and took her unawares too, but she did not show the smallest symptom of having been even grazed. She neither blushed nor stammered, nor looked conscious, nor affected to look unconscious. She was charmingly natural!

But this was not all: Karlsefin also fell in love on the spot,—over head and ears and hair, and hat to boot; neither did he show sign of it! After the trifling ceremonies usual on an introduction were

over, he turned to continue his conversation with Leif and paid no further attention to Gudrid, while she busied herself in preparing supper. It is true that he looked at her now and then, but of course he looked at everybody, now and then, in the course of the evening. Besides, it is well-known what is said about the rights of the feline species in reference to royalty. At supper Gudrid waited on the guests, Karlsefin therefore, necessarily paid her somewhat more attention in accepting her civilities, but Thorward was quite as attentive as he, so that the most sharp-witted match-maker in the world would have failed to note any symptom of anything whatever in regard to either of them.

Gudrid felt this a little, for she was accustomed to admiration from the young men of Ericsfiord and Heriulfness, and, you know, people don't like to want what they are accustomed to. What Karlsefin thought, he did not show and never mentioned, therefore we cannot tell.

Now, good reader, pray do not run away with the notion that this love affair is the plot on which the story is to hinge! Nothing of the kind. It ran its course much more rapidly, and terminated much more abruptly, than you probably suppose—as the sequel will show.

During supper there was not much conversation, for all were hungry, but afterwards, when cans of home-brewed ale were handed round, the tongues began to move. Leif soon observed that Karlsefin merely sipped his beer, but never once drank.

"You do not drink," he said, pushing a large silver tankard towards him; "come, fill up."

"Thanks, I drink but sparingly," said Karlsefin, taking up the large tankard and admiring the workmanship.

"In good sooth ye do," cried Biarne, with a laugh; "a mouse could hardly slake his thirst with all that you have yet imbibed."

"I have been so long at sea," rejoined Karlsefin, smiling, "that I have lost my relish for beer. We had nothing but water with us. Where got you this tankard, Leif, it is very massive and the workmanship such as one seldom meets with save in kings' houses?"

"It belonged to a king!" replied Leif, with a look of pride. "Good King Olaf Tryggvissón gave it to me on an occasion when I chanced to do him some small service. Many winters have passed since then."

"Indeed, Leif! then you must be a favourite with King Olaf," exclaimed Karlsefin, "for I am the bearer of another gift to you from his royal hand."

"To me?"

"Ay. Hearing that I meant to sail over to Greenland this summer, he asked me to bear you his remembrances, and gave me two slaves to present to you in token of his continued friendship."

Leif's face beamed with satisfaction, and he immediately filled and quaffed a bumper of ale to King Olaf's health, which example was followed by Biarne and the guests, as well as by the house-carls who sat on benches in various parts of the hall drinking their ale and listening to the conversation. Even little Olaf—who had been named after the king of Norway—filled his tankard to the brim with milk, and quaffed it off with a swagger that was worthy of a descendant of a long line of sea-kings, who could trace their lineage back to Odin himself.

"The slaves," continued Karlsefin, "are from the land of the Scots. Wouldst like to see a Scotsman, Gudrid?" he added, turning to the widow who sat near him.

"I should like it much. I have heard of the Scots in Iceland. 'Tis said they are a well-favoured race, stout warriors, and somewhat fond of trading."

Leif and Biarne both laughed loud and long at this.

"In good truth they are a stout race, and fight like very wild-cats, as Biarne and I can testify; as to their being well-favoured, there can be no question about that; though they are rather more rugged than the people farther south, and—yes, they *are* good traders, and exceedingly cautious men. They think well before they speak, and they speak slowly—sometimes they won't speak at all. Ha! ha! Here, I drink to the land of the Scot. It is a grand good land, like our own dear old Norway."

"Brother-in-law," exclaimed Gudrid, reproachfully, "do you forget that you are an Icelander?"

“Forget!” exclaimed Leif, tossing back his yellow locks, and raising the tankard again to pledge his native land; “no, I shall only forget Iceland when I forget to live; but I don’t forget, also, that it is only about 130 years since my great-grandfather and his companions came over from Norway to Iceland. Before that it was an unpeopled rock in the Northern Sea, without name or history. (Iceland was colonised by Norsemen about the year 874.) ’Twas as little known then as Vinland is known now.”

“By the way, Biarne,” said Karlsefin, turning to his friend, “the mention of Vinland reminds me that, when you and I met last, you did not give me a full account of that discovery, seeing that you omitted to mention your own share in it. Tell me how was it, and when and where was it? Nay, have I unintentionally touched on a sore point?” he added, on observing a slight shade of annoyance pass over Biarne’s usually cheerful countenance.

“He is a little sore about it,” said Leif, laughing. “Come, Biarne, don’t be thin-skinned. You know the saying, A dutiful son makes a glad father. You had the best of reasons for acting as you did.”

“Ay, but people don’t believe in these best of reasons,” retorted Biarne, still annoyed, though somewhat mollified by Leif’s remarks.

“Never mind, ’tis long past now. Come, give us the saga. ’Tis a good one, and will bear re-telling.”

“Oh yes,” exclaimed Olaf, with sparkling eyes, for the boy dearly loved anything that bore the faintest resemblance to a saga or story, “tell it, Biarne.”

“Not I,” said Biarne; “Leif can tell it as well as I, if he chooses.”

“Well, I’ll try,” said Leif, laying his huge hand on the table and looking earnestly at Karlsefin and Thorward. The latter was a very silent man, and had scarcely uttered a word all the evening, but he appeared to take peculiar interest in Vinland, and backed up the request that Leif would give an account of its discovery.

“About twenty summers ago,” said Leif, “my father, Eric the Red, and his friend Heriulf, Biarne’s father, came over here from Iceland. (A.D. 986.) Biarne was a very young man at the time—little more than a boy—but he was a man of enterprise, and fond of going abroad, and possessed a merchant-ship of his own with which he gathered wealth, and, I will say it, reputation also—though perhaps I should not say that to his face.

“He was a good son, and used to be by turns a year abroad and a year with his father. He chanced to be away in Norway when Heriulf and my father Eric came over to Greenland. On returning to Iceland he was so much disappointed to hear of his father’s departure that he would not unload his ship, but resolved to follow his old custom and take up his winter abode with his father. ‘Who will go with me to Greenland?’ said he to his men. ‘We will all go,’ replied the men. ‘Our expedition,’ said Biarne, ‘will be thought foolish, as none of us have ever been on the Greenland sea before.’ ‘We mind not that,’ said the men—so away they sailed for three days and lost sight of Iceland. Then the wind failed; after that a north wind and a fog set in, and they knew not where they were sailing to; and this lasted many days. At length the sun appeared. Then they knew the quarters of the sky, and, after sailing a day and a night, made the land.

“They saw that it was without mountains, was covered with wood, and that there were small hills inland. Biarne saw that this did not answer to the description of Greenland; he knew he was too far south, so he left the land on the larboard side, and sailed two days and nights before they got sight of land again. The men asked Biarne if this was Greenland, but he said it was not, ‘For on Greenland,’ he says, ‘there are great snowy mountains, but this is flat and covered with trees.’ Here the wind fell and the men wanted to go ashore, ‘Because,’ said they, ‘we have need of wood and water.’ Biarne replied, ‘Ye are not in want of either;’ and the men blamed him for this,—but the season was far spent, he knew not how long it might take him to find Greenland, so he had no time to spare.—Was it not so?” said Leif, appealing to his friend.

“It was so,” replied Biarne, nodding gravely.

“Well then,” continued Leif, “it must be told that he ordered them to hoist the sail, which they did, and, turning the bow from the land, kept the sea for three days and nights, with a fine breeze from the south-west, when a third time land was seen, with high snowy mountains. Still Biarne would not land, for it was not like what had been reported of Greenland. They soon found it to be an island, and, turning from it, stood out to sea, when the breeze increased to a gale, forcing them to take in a reef; so they sailed for three days and nights more, and made land the fourth time. This turned out to be Greenland, and quite close to Heriulf’s dwelling at Heriulfness. Biarne then gave up seafaring, and dwelt with his old father as long as he lived; but since his death he has been sometimes at sea and sometimes at home. Now, these lands which Biarne discovered, were what I have since called Vinland.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Biarne, with a look of indignation; “and when I afterwards fared to Norway they blamed me for not going on shore and exploring these lands—as if I, at the end of autumn, could afford to put off time in explorations, when it was all I could do to make my port before the winter set in!” He finished off by striking the table with his fist, seizing his tankard, and draining it to the bottom.

“I have often observed,” said Karlsefin, quietly, “that people who sit by their firesides at home, and do nothing, are usually very severe and noisy in their remarks on those who fare abroad and do great things; but that arises not so much from ill-will as ignorance.”

“But what of your own doings, Leif?” said Thorward, breaking in here impatiently.

“Well, I didn’t do much,” replied Leif. “I only took possession, and didn’t keep it. This was the way of it. Fourteen years after this voyage of Biarne, (about the year A.D. 1000) I was seized with a desire to see these new lands. I bought Biarne’s ship from him, set sail with a good crew, and found the lands, just as Biarne had described them, far away to the south of Greenland. I landed and gave names to some places. At the farthest south point we built huts and spent the winter, but returned home in spring. I called this part Vinland, and this is the reason why: We had a German with us named Tyrker, who is with me here still. One day Tyrker was lost; I was very anxious about him, fearing that he had been killed by wild beasts or Skraelingers, (Esquimaux or savages, probably Indians,) so I sent out parties to search. In the evening we found him coming home in a state of great excitement, having found fruit which, he said, was grapes. The sight and taste of the fruit, to which he was used in his own land, had excited him to such an extent that we thought he was drunk, and for some time he would do nothing but laugh and devour grapes, and talk German, which none of us understood. At last he spoke Norse, and told us that he had found vines and grapes in great abundance. We found that this was true—at least we found a berry which was quite new to us. We went off next day, and, gathering enough to load our boat, brought them away with us. From this circumstance I called it Vinland. Two years after that my brother Thorwald went to Vinland, wintered three years there, was killed by the Skraelingers, and his men returned to Greenland. Then my youngest brother, Thorstein, who was Gudrid’s husband, went off to Vinland to fetch home the body of our brother Thorwald, but was driven back by stress of weather. He was taken ill soon after that, and died. Since then Gudrid has dwelt with my household, and glad we are to have her. This is the whole story of Vinland; so if you want to know more about it you must e’en go on a voyage of discovery for yourself.”

“I should like nothing better,” replied Karlsefin, “if I could only—”

At that moment the door was burst violently open, and a man with bloodshot eyes and labouring breath rushed in exclaiming, “The Skraelinger! the Skraelinger are upon us!”

## **Chapter Three.**

### **Dark War-Clouds Lower, but Clear away without a Shower—Voices and Legs do Good Service**

“Up, carls, buckle on your war-gear!” cried Leif, rising hastily on hearing the announcement with which the last chapter ended.

“Run, Thorward, call out our men,” whispered Karlsefin; “I will stay to learn what Leif means to do. Bring them all up to the door.”

Thorward was gone almost before the sentence was finished. Leif and his house-carls, of whom there were ten present at the time, did not take long to busk them for the fight. The Norse of old were born, bred, and buried—if they escaped being killed and cut to pieces—in the midst of alarms. Their armour was easily donned, and not very cumbrous. Even while Leif was giving the first order to his men, Gudrid had run to the peg on which hung his sword and helmet, and brought him these implements of war.

“My men and I shall be able to render you some service, Leif,” said Karlsefin; “what do you intend to do?”

“Do!” exclaimed Leif with a grim laugh, as he buckled on his sword, “why, I shall give the Skraelingers a tremendous fright, that is all. The rascals! They knew well that we were short-handed just now, and thought to take advantage of us; but hah! they do not seem to be aware that we chance to have stout visitors with us to-night. So, lads, follow me.”

Biarne, meanwhile, had darted out on the first alarm, and assembled all the men in the settlement, so that when Leif, Karlsefin, and the housemen issued out of the cottage they found about a dozen men assembled, and others running up every moment to join them. Before these were put in array most of the men of Karlsefin’s ship, numbering forty, and those belonging to Thorward, numbering thirty, came up, so that when all were mustered they were little if at all short of one hundred stout warriors.

The moon came out brightly at the time, and Leif chuckled as he watched Biarne put the men hastily into marching order.

“Methought you said that war was distasteful,” observed Karlsefin, in some surprise.

“So it is, so it is, friend,” replied Leif, still laughing in a low tone; “but there will be no war to-night. Leave your bows behind you, lads,” he added, addressing the men; “you won’t want them; shield and sword will be enough. For the matter of that, we might do without both. Now, lads, follow my leading, and do as I bid you; advance with as little noise as may be.”

So saying, Leif led the way out of the little hamlet towards the extremity of the ridge or spur of the mountains that sheltered Ericsfiord from the north-west.

Towards that same extremity another band of men were hastening on the other side of the ridge. It was a band of our hairy friends whom the Norsemen called Skraelingers.

Truly there was something grand in the look and bearing of the tall man with the flat face, as he led his band to attack the warlike Norsemen, and there was something almost sublime in the savage, resolute aspect of the men who followed him—each being armed with a large walrus spear, and each being, moreover, an adept in the use of it.

Flatface (in default of a better, let that name stick to him) had ascertained beyond a doubt that the entire available force of Norsemen in Ericsfiord had, in consequence of fishing and other expeditions, been reduced to barely thirty fighting men. He himself could muster a band of at least one hundred and fifty good men and true—not to mention hairy, a hundred and fifty seals having unwillingly contributed their coats to cover these bloodthirsty Skraelingers. The Norsemen, Flatface knew, were strong men and bold, besides being large, but he resolved to take them by surprise, and

surely (he argued with himself) a hundred and fifty brave men with spears will be more than a match for thirty sleepy men unarmed and in bed!

Flatface had screwed himself up with such considerations; made a few more inflammatory speeches to his men, by way of screwing them up also, and then, a little before midnight, set forth on his expedition.

Now it chanced that there was a man among the Norsemen who was a great hunter and trapper. His name was Tyrker—the same Tyrker mentioned by Leif as being the man who had found grapes in Vinland. Leif said he was a German, but he said so on no better authority than the fact that he had originally come to Norway from the south of Europe. It is much more probable that he was a Turk, for, whereas the Germans are known to be a well-sized handsome race of fair men, this Tyrker was an ugly little dark wiry fellow, with a high forehead, sharp eyes, and a small face; but he was extremely active, and, although an elderly man, few of the youths in Ericsfiord could beat him at feats requiring dexterity.

But, whether German or Turk, Tyrker was an enthusiastic trapper of white, or arctic foxes. These creatures being very numerous in that part of Greenland, he was wont to go out at all hours, late and early, to visit his traps. Hence it happened that, on the night in question, Tyrker found himself in company with two captured arctic foxes at, the extremity of the mountain spur before referred to.

He could see round the corner of the spur into the country beyond, but as the country there was not attractive, even at its best, he paid no attention to it. He chanced, however, to cast upon it one glance after setting his traps, just as he was about to return home. That glance called forth a steady look, which was followed by a stare of surprise, and the deep guttural utterance of the word “zz-grandimaghowl!” which, no doubt, was Turkish, at that ancient date, for “hallo!”

It was the band of hairy creatures that had met his astonished sight. Tyrker shrank behind the spur and peeped round it for a few seconds to make quite sure. Then, turning and creeping fairly out of sight, he rose and bounded back to the hamlet, as though he had been a youth of twenty. As we have seen, he arrived, gasping, in time to warn his friends.

Between the hamlet and the spur where Tyrker’s traps were set there were several promontories, or projections from the cliffs, all of which had to be passed before the spur came in view. Leif led his men past the first and second of these at a run. Then, believing that he had gone far enough, he ordered his band to draw close up under the cliffs, where the shadow was deepest, saying that he would go alone in advance to reconnoitre.

“And mark me, lads,” he said, “when I give a loud sneeze, do you give vent to a roar that will only stop short of splitting your lungs; then give chase, and yell to your hearts’ content as you run; but see to it that ye keep together and that no man runs past *me*. There is plenty of moonlight to let you see what you’re about. If any man tries to overshoot me in the race I’ll hew off his head.”

This last remark was no figure of speech. In those days men were but too well accustomed to hewing off heads. Leif meant to have his orders attended to, and the men understood him.

On reaching the second projection of cliff after leaving his men, Leif peeped round cautiously and beheld the advancing Skraelingers several hundred yards off. He returned at once to his men and took up a position at their head in the deep shadow of the cliffs.

Although absolutely invisible themselves, the Norsemen could see the Skraelingers quite plainly in the moonlight, as they came slowly and with great caution round each turn of the footpath that led to the hamlet. There was something quite awe-inspiring in the manner of their approach. Evidently Flatface dreaded a surprise, for he put each leg very slowly in advance of the other, and went on tiptoe, glancing quickly on either side between each step. His followers—in a compact body, in deep silence and with bated breath—followed his steps and his example.

When they came to the place where the men crouched in ambush, Leif took up a large stone and cast it high over their heads. So quietly was this done that none even of his own party heard him move or saw the stone, though they heard it fall with a *thud* on the sand beyond.

The Skraelingers heard it too, and stopped abruptly—each man on one leg, with the other leg and his arms more or less extended, just as if he had been suddenly petrified. So in truth he had been—with horror!

To meet an open enemy, however powerful, would have been a pleasure compared with that slow nervous advance in the midst of such dead silence! As nothing followed the sound, however, the suspended legs began to descend slowly again towards the ground, when Leif sneezed!

If Greenland's icy mountains had become one monstrous polar bear, whose powers of voice, frozen for prolonged ages, had at last found vent that night in one concentrated roar, the noise could scarcely have excelled that which instantly exploded from the Norsemen.

The effect on the Skraelingers was almost miraculous. A bomb-shell bursting in the midst of a hundred and fifty Kilkenny cats could not have been more effective, and the result would certainly have borne some marks of resemblance. Each hairy creature sprang nearly his own height into the air, and wriggled while there, as if impatient to turn and fly before reaching the ground. Earth regained, the more active among them overshot and overturned the clumsy, whereby fifty or sixty were instantly cast down, but these rose again like spring-jacks and fled, followed by a roar of laughter from their foes, which, mingled as it was with howls and yells, did infinitely more to appal the Skraelingers than the most savage war-cry could have done.

But they were followed by more than laughter. The Norsemen immediately gave chase—still yelling and roaring as they ran, for Leif set the example, and his followers remembered his threat.

Karlsefin and Biarne kept one on each side of Leif, about a pace behind him.

"If they fight as well as they run," observed the former, "they must be troublesome neighbours."

"They are not bad fighters," replied Leif; "but sometimes they deem it wise to run."

"Not unlike to other people in that respect," said Biarne; "but it seems to me that we might overhaul them if we were to push on."

He shot up to Leif as he spoke, but the latter checked him.

"Hold back, Biarne; I mean them no harm, and wish no bloodshed—only they must have a good fright. The lads, no doubt, would like to run in and make short work of them; but I intend to breathe the lads, which will in the end do just as well as fighting to relieve their feelings.—Enough. It is ill talking and running."

They were silent after that, and ran thus for fully an hour, at nearly the top of their speed. But Leif sometimes checked his men, and sometimes urged them on, so that they fancied he was chasing with full intent to run the Skraelingers down. When the fugitives showed signs of flagging, he uttered a tremendous roar, and his men echoed it, sending such a thrill to the hearts of the Skraelingers that they seemed to recover fresh wind and strength; then he pushed after them harder than ever, and so managed that, without catching or killing one, he terrified them almost out of their wits, and ran them nearly to death.

At last they came to a place where there was an abrupt bend in the mountains. Here Leif resolved to let them go. When they were pretty near the cliff round which the path turned, he put on what, in modern sporting phraseology, is termed a spurt, and came up so close with the flying band that those in rear began to glance despairingly over their shoulders. Suddenly Leif gave vent to a roar, into which he threw all his remaining strength. It was taken up and prolonged by his men. The horror-struck Skraelingers shrieked in reply, swept like a torrent round the projecting cliff, and disappeared!

Leif stopped at once, and held up his hand. All his men stopped short also, and though they heard the Skraelingers still howling as they fled, no one followed them any farther. Indeed, most of the Norsemen were panting vehemently, and rather glad than otherwise to be allowed to halt.

There were, however, two young men among them—tall, strong-boned, and thin, but with broad shoulders, and grave, earnest, though not exactly handsome countenances—who appeared to be perfectly cool and in good wind after their long run. Leif noticed them at once.

"Yonder youths seem to think little of this sort of thing," he said to Karlsefin.



“You are right, Leif; it is mere child’s play to them. These are the two Scots—the famous runners—whom I was charged by King Olaf to present to you. Why, these men, I’ll engage to say, could overtake the Skraelingers even yet, if they chose.”

“Say you so?” cried Leif. “Do they speak Norse?”

“Yes; excellently well.”

“Their names?”

“The one is Heika, the other Hake.”

“Ho! Hake and Heika, come hither,” cried Leif, beckoning to the men, and hastening round the point, where the Skraelingers could be seen nearly a mile off, and still running as if all the evil spirits of the North were after them.

“See there, carls; think you that ye could overtake these rascals?”

The Scots looked at each other, nodded, smiled, and said they thought they could.

“Do it, then. Let them see how you can use your legs, and give them a shout as you draw near; but have a care: do them no hurt, and see that they do no injury to you. Take no arms; your legs must suffice on this occasion.”

The Scots looked again at each other, and laughed, as if they enjoyed the joke; then they started off like a couple of deer at a pace which no Norseman legs had ever before equalled, or even approached.

Leif, Biarne, and the men gazed in speechless wonder, much to the amusement of Karlsefin and Thorward, while Hake and Heika made straight for the flying band and came up with them. They shouted wildly as they drew near. The Skraelingers looked back, and seeing only two unarmed men, stopped to receive them.

“As the saying goes,” remarked Biarne, “a stern chase is a long one; but to-night proves the truth of that other saying, that there is no rule without an exception.”

“What are they doing now?” cried Leif, laughing. “See—they are mad!”

Truly it seemed as if they were; for, after separating and coursing twice completely round the astonished natives, the two Scots performed a species of war-dance before them, which had a sort of fling about it, more easily conceived than described. In the middle of this they made a dart at the group so sudden and swift that Hake managed to overturn Flatface with a tremendous buffet, and Heika did the same to his second in command with an energetic cuff. The Skraelingers were taken so thoroughly by surprise that the Scots had sheered off and got out of reach before a spear could be thrown.

Of course a furious rush was made at them, but the hairy men might as well have chased the wind. After tormenting and tantalising them a little longer, the Scots returned at full speed to their friends, and the Skraelingers, glad to be rid of them, hastened to seek the shelter of the gloomy gorge from which they had originally issued, “like a wolf on the fold.”

## **Chapter Four.**

### **Important Events Transpire, which end in a Voyage of Discovery**

Some weeks afterwards, Karlsefin and Gudrid went down to walk together on the sea-beach. It would appear that lovers were as fond of rambling together in those olden times as they are in these modern days. It was evening when they went to ramble thus—another evidence of similarity in taste between the moderns and ancients.

“Karlsefin,” said Gudrid, stopping at the margin of the fiord, and looking pensively towards the horizon, where golden clouds and air and sea appeared to mingle harmoniously, “I wonder that you, with good ships and many stout men and plenty of means, should choose to remain in this barren spot, instead of searching out the famous Vinland and making a settlement there.”

“This barren spot is very bright to me, Gudrid; I have no desire to leave it yet a while. Since you and I were betrothed the ocean has lost its attractions. Besides, would you have me set out on a voyage of discovery at the beginning of winter.”

“Nay; but you do not even talk about going when spring comes round.”

“Because I have other things to talk of, Gudrid.”

“I fear me that you are a lazy man,” returned the widow, with a smile, “and will prove but a sorry husband. Just think,” she added, with sudden animation, “what a splendid country it must be; and what a desirable change for all of us. Thick and leafy woods like those of old Norway, instead of these rugged cliffs and snow-clad hills. Fields of waving grass and rye, instead of moss-covered rocks and sandy soil. Trees large enough to build houses and merchant-ships, instead of willow bushes that are fit for nothing except to save our poor cattle from starvation when the hay crop runs out; besides, longer sunshine in winter and more genial warmth all the year round, instead of howling winds and ice and snow. Truly I think our adopted home here has been woefully misnamed.”

“And yet I love it, Gudrid, for I find the atmosphere genial and the sunshine very bright.”

“Foolish man!” said Gudrid, with a little laugh. “And then,” she added, recurring to her theme, “there are grapes,—though, to be sure, I know not what these are, never having tasted them. Biarne says they are very good—do you think so too?”

“They are magnificent,” answered Karlsefin. “In southern lands, where Tyrker comes from, they have a process whereby they can make a drink from grapes, which maddens youth and quickens the pulse of age,—something like our own beer.”

“It does not please me to hear that,” replied Gudrid gravely; “some of our carls are too fond of beer. When old Heriulf was sick, a little of it did him good, and when Eric the Red was in his last days he seemed to gather a little strength and comfort from beer; but I never could perceive that it ever did anything to young men except make them boast, and talk nonsense, and look foolish,—or, what is worse, quarrel and fight.”

“Right, Gudrid, right,” said Karlsefin; “my opinion at least is the same as yours, whether it be right or wrong. There is some reason in applying heat to cold, but it seems to me unnecessary to add heat to warmth, artificial strength to natural vigour, and it is dangerous sometimes to add fuel to fire. I am glad you think as I think on this point, for it is well that man and wife should be agreed in matters of importance.—But to return to Vinland: I have been thinking much about it since I came here, though saying little,—for it becomes a man to be silent and circumspect in regard to unformed plans. My mind is to go thither next spring, but only on one condition.”

“And what may that be?” asked Gudrid, looking up with a little surprise, and some interest.

“That you shall go with me, Gudrid; for which end it will be needful that you and I should wed this winter.”

Gudrid could not help blushing a little and looking down, for Karlsefin, despite his suavity, had a way with him, when thoroughly in earnest, that was very impressive. She did not hesitate, however, but answered with straightforward candour, "I will not say nay to that if my brother Leif is willing."

"It is settled then," replied Karlsefin decisively, "for Leif has already told me that he is willing if you are, and so—"

At this interesting point in the conversation they were interrupted by a loud merry laugh not very far from them, and next moment little Olaf, starting out from behind a bush, ran shouting into Gudrid's extended arms. "Oh, what do you think?" he exclaimed, "aunt Freydisa has come over from Heriulfness, and is in *such* a rage because Biarne has told her that Thorward has been making love to his cousin Astrid, and—"

"Hush, boy," said Gudrid, covering his mouth with her hand, "you should not talk so of your aunt. Besides, you know that it is an evil thing to get the name of a tale-bearer."

"I did not think it was tale-bearing," replied the lad, somewhat abashed, "for it is no secret. Leif was there, and Astrid herself, and all the house-carls in the hall must have heard her, for she spoke very loud. And oh! you should have seen her give Thorward the cold shoulder when he came in!"

"Well, well, Olaf, hold your noisy tongue," said Gudrid, laughing, "and come, tell me how would you like to go to Vinland?"

"Like to go to Vinland!" echoed the boy, turning an ardent gaze full on Karlsefin, "are you going there, sir? Will you take *me*?"

Karlsefin laughed, and said, "You are too quick in jumping to conclusions, child. Perhaps I may go there; but you have not yet answered Gudrid's question—would you like to go?"

"I would like it well," replied Olaf, with a bright look of hopeful expectation that said far more than words could have expressed.

Just then Thorward was seen approaching along the beach. His brows were knit, his lips pursed, and his eyes fixed on the ground. He was so engrossed with his thoughts that he did not perceive his friends.

"Here he comes," said Karlsefin—"in the blues evidently, for he does not see us."

"We had better leave you to his company," said Gudrid, laughing; "a man i' the blues is no pleasure to a woman.—Come, Olaf, you and I shall to the dairy and see how the cattle fare."

Olaf's capacity for imbibing milk and cream being unlimited, he gladly accepted this invitation, and followed his aunt, while Karlsefin advanced to meet his friend.

"How now, Thorward, methinks an evil spirit doth possess thee!"

"An evil spirit!" echoed Thorward, with a wrathful look; "nay, a legion of evil spirits possess me! A plague on that fellow Biarne: he has poisoned the ears of Freydisa with lies about that girl Astrid, to whom I have never whispered a sweet word since we landed."

"I trust you have not whispered sour words to her," said Karlsefin, smiling.

"And Freydisa, forsooth, gives me the cold shoulder," continued the exasperated Norseman, not noticing the interruption, "as if I were proved guilty by the mere assertion."

"It is my advice to you, Thorward, that you return the compliment, and give the cold shoulder to Freydisa. The woman has a shrewish temper; she is a very vixen, and will lead you the life of a dog if you marry her."

"I had rather," said Thorward between his teeth, and stamping, "live a dog's life with Freydisa than live the life of a king without her!"

Karlsefin laughed at this, and Thorward, taking offence, said fierily, and with some scorn—"Thinkest thou that because thy Gudrid is so smooth-tongued she is an angel?"

"That is what I am inclined to think," answered Karlsefin, with a smile that still further exasperated his friend.

“Perchance you may find yourself mistaken,” said Thorward. “Since you are so free with your warnings, let me remind you that although the course of your courtship runs smooth, there is an old proverb—descended from Odin himself, I believe—which assures us that *true* love never did so run.”

“Then I recall my words, Thorward, and congratulate you on your true love—for assuredly your courtship runs in an uncommonly rugged course.”

At this Thorward turned on his heel and walked away in a towering passion.

It so happened that, on drawing near to Brattalid, he met Biarne coming in the opposite direction. Nothing could have pleased him better—for in the state of his mind at the time he would have turned savagely on himself, had that been possible, in order to relieve his feelings.

“So!” he cried, confronting Biarne, “well met! Tell me, Biarne, didst thou poison the ears of Freydisa by telling her that I had been courting thy cousin Astrid?”

Biarne, who was not aware of the consequences of what he had said in jest, felt inclined to laugh, but he checked himself and flushed somewhat, not being accustomed to be addressed in such haughty tones. Instead of explaining the matter, as he might otherwise have done, he merely said, “I did.”

“Liar!” exclaimed Thorward fiercely, for he was a very resolute man when roused; “go, tell her that the assertion was a falsehood. Go *now*, and come back to tell me thou hast done it, else will I chop thy carcase into mince-meat. Go; I will await thee here.”

He laid his hand upon his sword, but Biarne said quietly, “I go, sir;” and, turning round, hastened up to the hamlet.

Thorward could scarcely believe his eyes, for Biarne was fully as stout as himself, and somewhat taller, besides having the look of a courageous man. He had issued his imperative mandate more as a defiance and challenge than anything else, so that he gazed after the retreating Biarne with mingled feelings of surprise, contempt, and pity; but surprise predominated. He had not long to wait, however, for in about ten minutes Biarne returned.

“Well, have you told her?”

“I have,” replied Biarne.

“Hah!” exclaimed Thorward, very much perplexed, and not knowing what to say next.

“But, Thorward,” said Biarne, after a momentary pause, “methinks that you and I must fight now.”

“With all my heart,” answered Thorward, much relieved, and again grasping his sword.

“Nay, not with such weapons,” said Biarne, stepping up to him, “but with the weapons of friendship.”

With that he bestowed such a hearty buffet on Thorward’s left ear that it turned the irascible man head over heels, and laid him at full length on the sand.

Thorward rose slowly, being somewhat stunned, with a confused impression that there was something wrong with his head. Before he had quite recovered, Biarne burst into a laugh and seized him by the hand.

“Freydisa bids me tell you—” he said, and paused.

The pause was intentional. He saw that Thorward was on the point of snatching away his hand and returning the blow or drawing his sword; but he restrained himself in order to hear Freydisa’s message.

“She bids me tell you,” repeated Biarne, “that you are a goose.”

This was not calculated to soothe an angry man, but Thorward reflected that the epithet was figurative, and bore a peculiar signification when uttered by a woman; he therefore continued his self-restraint and waited for more.

“She also said,” added Biarne, “that she never for a moment believed my statement (which, by the way, was only made in jest), and that she thinks you deserve a good buffet on the ear for taking the thing up so hotly. Agreeing with her entirely in this, I have fulfilled her wish and given you your

deserts. Moreover, she expects you to accompany her to Heriulfness to-night. So now," said Biarne, releasing Thorward's hand and touching his sword-hilt, "if you are still inclined—."

"Well, well," said Thorward, whose visage, while his friend was speaking, had undergone a series of contortions indicative of a wild conflict of feelings in his breast, "well, well, I am a goose, and deserved the buffet. After all, I did call you a liar, so we are quits, Biarne—tit for tat. Come, let us shake hands and go up to Leif's cottage. You said Freydissa was there, I think."

During that winter Karlsefin married Gudrid and Thorward Freydissa, and, in the following spring, they embarked in Karlsefin's ship—with a large party of men, women, children, and cattle—and set sail for Vinland.

## **Chapter Five.**

### **Freydissa Shows Her Temper and a Whale Checks it—Poetical and Other Touches**

The expedition which now set out for Vinland was on a much larger scale than any of the expeditions which had preceded it. Biarne and Leif had acted the part of discoverers only—not colonisers—and although previous parties had passed several winters in Vinland, they had not intended to take up a permanent abode there—as was plain from the fact that they brought neither women nor flocks nor herds with them. Karlsefin, on the contrary, went forth fully equipped for colonisation.

His ship, as we have said, was a large one, with a decked poop and forecastle, fitted to brave the most tempestuous weather—at least as well fitted to do so as were the ships of Columbus—and capable of accommodating more than a hundred people. He took sixty men with him and five women, besides his own wife and Thorward's. Thorward himself, and Biarne, accompanied the expedition, and also Olaf—to his inexpressible joy, but Leif preferred to remain at home, and promised to take good care of Thorward's ship, which was left behind. Astrid was one of the five women who went with this expedition; the other four were Gunhild, Thora, Sigrid, and Bertha. Gunhild and Sigrid were wives to two of Biarne's men. Thora was handmaiden to Gudrid; Bertha handmaid to Freydissa. Of all the women Bertha was the sweetest and most beautiful, and she was also very modest and good-tempered, which was a fortunate circumstance, because her mistress Freydissa had temper enough, as Biarne used to remark, for a dozen women. Biarne was fond of teasing Freydissa; but she liked Biarne, and sometimes took his pleasantries well—sometimes ill.

It was intended that, when the colony was fairly established, the ship should be sent back to Greenland to fetch more of the men's wives and children.

A number of cattle, horses, and sheep were also carried on this occasion to Vinland. These were stowed in the waist or middle of the vessel, between the benches where the rowers sat when at work. The rowers did not labour much at sea, as the vessel was at most times able to advance under sail. During calms, however, and when going into creeks, or on landing—also in doubling capes when the wind was not suitable—the oars were of the greatest value. Karlsefin and the principal people slept under the high poop. A number of the men slept under the forecastle, and the rest lay in the waist near the cattle—sheltered from the weather by tents or awnings which were called tilts.

It may perhaps surprise some readers to learn that men could venture in such vessels to cross the northern seas from Norway to Iceland, and thence to Greenland; but it is not so surprising when we consider the small size of the vessels in which Columbus afterwards crossed the Atlantic in safety, and when we reflect that those Norsemen had been long accustomed, in such vessels, to traverse the ocean around the coasts of Europe in all directions—round the shores of Britain, up the Baltic, away to the Faroe Islands, and up the Mediterranean even as far as the Black Sea. In short, the Norsemen of old were magnificent seamen, and there can be no question that much of the ultimate success of Britain on the sea is due, not only to our insular position, but also to the insufficiently appreciated fact that the blood of the hardy and adventurous vikings of Norway still flows in our veins.

It was a splendid spring morning when Karlsefin hoisted his white-and-blue sail, and dropped down Ericsfiord with a favouring breeze, while Leif and his people stood on the stone jetty at Brattalid, and waved hats and shawls to their departing friends.

For Olaf, Thora, and Bertha it was a first voyage, and as the vessel gradually left the land behind, the latter stood at the stern gazing wistfully towards the shore, while tears flowed from her pretty blue eyes and chased each other over her fair round face—for Bertha left an old father behind her in Greenland.

“Don’t cry, Bertha,” said Olaf, putting his fat little hand softly into that of the young girl.

“Oh! I shall perhaps *never* see him again,” cried Bertha, with another burst of tears.

“Yes, you will,” said Olaf, cheerily. “You know that when we get comfortably settled in Vinland we shall send the ship back for your father, and mine too, and for everybody in Ericsfiord and Heriulfness. Why, we’re going to forsake Greenland altogether and never go back to it any more. Oh! I am *so* glad.”

“I wish, I *wish* I had never come,” said Bertha, with a renewed flow of tears, for Olaf’s consolations were thrown away on her.

It chanced that Freydissa came at that moment upon the poop, where Karlsefin stood at the helm, and Gudrid with some others were still gazing at the distant shore.

Freydissa was one of those women who appear to have been born women by mistake—who are always chafing at their unfortunate fate, and endeavouring to emulate—even to overwhelm—men; in which latter effort they are too frequently successful. She was a tall elegant woman of about thirty years of age, with a decidedly handsome face, though somewhat sharp of feature. She possessed a powerful will, a shrill voice and a vigorous frame, and was afflicted with a short, violent temper. She was decidedly a masculine woman. We know not which is the more disagreeable of the two—a masculine woman or an effeminate man.

But perhaps the most prominent feature in her character was her volubility when enraged,—the copiousness of her vocabulary and the tremendous force with which she shot forth her ideas and abuse in short abrupt sentences.

Now, if there was one thing more than another that roused the ire of Freydissa, it was the exhibition of feminine weakness in the shape of tears. She appeared to think that the credit of her sex in reference to firmness and self-command was compromised by such weakness. She herself never wept by any chance, and she was always enraged when she saw any other woman relieve her feelings in that way. When, therefore, she came on deck and found her own handmaid with her pretty little face swelled, or, as she expressed it, “begrutten,” and heard her express a wish that she had never left home, she lost command of herself—a loss that she always found it easy to come by—and, seizing Bertha by the shoulder, ordered her down into the cabin instantly.

Bertha sobbingly obeyed, and Freydissa followed. “Don’t be hard on her, poor soul,” murmured Thorward.

Foolish fellow! How difficult it is for man—ancient or modern—to learn when to hold his tongue! That suggestion would have fixed Freydissa’s determination if it had not been fixed before, and poor Bertha would certainly have received “a hearing,” or a “blowing-up,” or a “setting down,” such as she had not enjoyed since the date of Freydissa’s marriage, had it not been for the fortunate circumstance that a whale took it into its great thick head to come up, just then, and spout magnificently quite close to the vessel.

The sight was received with a shout by the men, a shriller shout by the women, and a screech of surprise and delight by little Olaf, who would certainly have gone over the side in his eagerness, had not Biarne caught him by the skirts of his tunic.

This incident happily diverted the course of Freydissa’s thoughts. Curiosity overcame indignation, and Bertha was reprieved for the time being. Both mistress and maid hastened to the side of the ship; the anger of the one evaporated and the tears of the other dried up when they saw the whale rise not more than a hundred yards from the ship. It continued to do this for a considerable time, sometimes appearing on one side, sometimes on the other; now at the stern, anon at the bow. In short it seemed as if the whale had taken the ship for a companion, and were anxious to make its acquaintance. At last it went down and remained under water so long that the voyagers began to think it had left them, when Olaf suddenly gave a shriek of delight and surprise:— “Oh! Oh! OH!” he exclaimed, looking and pointing straight down into the water, “here is the whale—right under the ship!”



And sure enough there it was, swimming slowly under the vessel, not two fathoms below the keel—its immense bulk being impressively visible, owing to the position of the observers, and its round eyes staring as if in astonishment at the strange creature above. (The author has seen a whale in precisely similar circumstances in a Norwegian fiord.) It expressed this astonishment, or whatever feeling it might be, by coming up suddenly to the surface, thrusting its big blunt head, like the bow of a boat, out of the sea, and spouting forth a column of water and spray with a deep snort or snore—to the great admiration of the whole ship's crew, for, although most of the men were familiar enough with whales, alive and dead, they had never, in all probability, seen one in such circumstances before.

Four or five times did the whale dive under the vessel in this fashion, and then it sheered off with a contemptuous flourish of its tail, as if disgusted with the stolid unsociable character of the ship, which seen from a submarine point of view must have looked uncommonly like a whale, and quite as big!

This episode, occurring so early in the voyage, and trifling though it was, tended to create in the minds of all—especially of the women and the younger people—a feeling of interest in the ocean, and an expectation of coming adventure, which, though not well defined, was slightly exciting and agreeable. Bertha, in particular, was very grateful to that whale, for it had not only diverted her thoughts a little from home-leaving and given her something new to think and talk about, but it had saved her from Freydisa and a severe scold.

The first night at sea was fine, with bright moonlight, and a soft wind on the quarter that carried them pleasantly over the rippling sea, and everything was so tranquil and captivating that no one felt inclined to go to rest. Karlsefin sat beside the helm, guiding the ship and telling sagas to the group of friends who stood, sat, or reclined on the deck and against the bulwarks of the high poop. He repeated long pieces of poetry, descriptive of the battles and adventures of their viking forefathers, and also gave them occasional pieces of his own composing, in reference to surrounding circumstances and the enterprise in which they were then embarked,—for Karlsefin was himself a skald or poet, although he pretended not to great attainments in that way.

From where they sat the party on the poop could see that the men on the high forecabin were similarly engaged, for they had gathered together in a group, and their heads were laid together as if listening intently to one of their number who sat in the centre of the circle. Below, in the waist of the ship, some humorous character appeared to be holding his mates enchained, for long periods of comparative silence—in which could be heard the monotonous tones of a single voice mingled with occasional soft lowing from the cattle—were suddenly broken by bursts of uproarious laughter, which, however, quickly subsided again, leaving prominent the occasional lowing and the prolonged monotone. Everything in and around the ship, that night, breathed of harmony and peace—though there was little knowledge among them of Him who is the Prince of Peace. We say “little” knowledge, because Christianity had only just begun to dawn among the Norsemen at that time, and there were some on board of that discovery-ship who were tinged with the first rays of that sweet light which, in the person of the Son of God, was sent to lighten the world and to shine more and more unto the perfect day.

“Now,” said Karlsefin, at the conclusion of one of his stories, “that is the saga of Halfdan the Black—at least it is part of his saga; but, friends, it seems to me that we must begin a saga of our own, for it is evident that if we are successful in this venture we shall have something to relate when we return to Greenland, and we must all learn to tell our saga in the same words, for that is the only way in which *truth* can be handed down to future generations, seeing that when men are careless in learning the truth they are apt to distort it so that honest men are led into telling lies unwittingly. They say that the nations of the south have invented a process whereby with a sharp-pointed tool they fashion marks on skins to represent words, so that once put down in this way a saga never changes. Would that we Norsemen understood that process!” said Karlsefin meditatively.

“It seems to me,” said Biarne, who reclined on the deck, leaning against the weather-bulwarks and running his fingers playfully through Olaf’s fair curls, “It seems to me that it were better to bestow the craft of the skald on the record of our voyage, for then the measure and the rhyme would chain men to the words, and so to the truth—that is, supposing they get truth to start with! Come, Karlsefin, begin our voyage for us.”

All present seemed to agree to that proposal, and urged Karlsefin to begin at once.

The skipper—for such indeed was his position in the ship—though a modest man, was by no means bashful, therefore, after looking round upon the moonlit sea for a few minutes, he began as follows:—

“When western waves were all unknown,  
And western fields were all unsown,  
When Iceland was the outmost bound  
That roving viking-keels had found—  
Gunbiorn then—Ulf Kraka’s son—  
Still farther west was forced to run  
By furious gales, and there saw land  
Stretching abroad on either hand.  
Eric of Iceland, called the Red,  
Heard of the news and straightway said—  
‘This western land I’ll go and see;  
Three summers hence look out for me.’  
He went; he landed; stayed awhile,  
And wintered first on ‘Eric’s Isle;’  
Then searched the coast both far and wide,  
Then back to Iceland o’er the tide.  
‘A wondrous land is this,’ said he,  
And called it Greenland of the sea.  
Twenty and five great ships sailed west  
To claim this gem on Ocean’s breast.  
With man and woman, horn and hoof,  
And bigging for the homestead roof.  
Some turned back—in heart but mice—  
Some sank amid the Northern ice.  
Half reached the land, in much distress,  
At Ericsfiord and Heriulfness.

Next, Biarne—Heriulf’s doughty son—  
Sought to trace out the aged one. (His father.)  
From Norway sailed, but missed his mark;  
Passed snow-topped Greenland in the dark;  
And came then to a new-found land—  
But did not touch the tempting strand;  
For winter winds oppressed him sore  
And kept him from his father’s shore.

Then Leif, the son of Eric, rose  
And straightway off to Biarne goes,  
Buys up his ship, takes all his men,  
Fares forth to seek that land again.  
Leif found the land; discovered more,

And spent a winter on the shore;  
Cut trees and grain to load the ship,  
And pay them for the lengthened trip.  
Named 'Hella-land' and 'Markland' too,  
And saw an island sweet with dew!  
And grapes in great abundance found,  
So named it Vinland all around.  
But after that forsook the shore,  
And north again for Greenland bore.

And now—we cross the moonlit seas  
To search this land of grapes and trees  
Biarne, Thorward, Karlsefin—  
Go forth this better land to win,  
With men and cattle not a few,  
And household gear and weapons too;  
And, best of all, with women dear,  
To comfort, counsel, check, and cheer.  
Thus far we've made a prosp'rous way,  
God speed us onward every day!"

They all agreed that this was a true account of the discovery of Vinland and of their own expedition as far as it had gone, though Gudrid said it was short, and Freydisa was of opinion that there was very little in it.

"But hold!" exclaimed Biarne, suddenly raising himself on his elbows; "Karlsefin, you are but a sorry skald after all."

"How so?" asked the skipper.

"Why, because you have made no mention of the chief part of our voyage."

"And pray what may that be?"

"Stay, I too am a skald; I will tell you."

Biarne, whose poetical powers were not of the highest type, here stretched forth his hand and said:—

"When Biarne, Thorward, Karlsefin,  
This famous voyage did begin,  
They stood upon the deck one night,  
And there beheld a moving sight.  
It made the very men grow pale,  
Their shudder almost rent the sail!  
For lo! they saw a mighty whale!

It drew a shriek from Olaf brave,  
Then plunged beneath the briny wave,  
And, while the women loudly shouted,  
Up came its blundering nose and spouted.  
Then underneath our keel it went,  
And glared with savage fury pent,  
And round about the ship it swum,  
Striking each man and woman dumb.

Stay—one there was who found a tongue  
And still retained her strength of lung.

Freydissa, beauteous matron bold,  
Resolved to give that whale a scold!  
But little cared that monster fish  
To gratify Freydissa's wish;  
He shook his tail, that naughty whale,  
And flourished it like any flail,  
And, ho! for Vinland he made sail!"

"Now, friends, was not that a great omission on the part of Karlsefin?"

"If the whale had brought his flail down on your pate it would have served you right, Biarne," said Freydissa, flushing, yet smiling in spite of herself.

"I think it is capital," cried Olaf, clapping his hands—"quite as good as the other poem."

Some agreed with Olaf, and some thought that it was not quite in keeping with Karlsefin's composition, but, after much debate, it was finally ruled that it should be added thereto as part and parcel of the great Vinland poem. Hence it appears in this chronicle, and forms an interesting instance of the way in which men, for the sake of humorous effect, mingle little pieces of fiction with veritable history.

By the time this important matter was settled it was getting so late that even the most enthusiastic admirer among them of moonlight on a calm sea became irresistibly desirous of going to sleep. They therefore broke up for the night; the women retired to their cabin, and none were left on deck except the steersman and the watch. Long before this the saga-tellers on the forecastle had retired; the monotone and the soft lowing of the cattle had ceased; man and beast had sought and found repose, and nothing was heard save the ripple of the water on the ship's sides as she glided slowly but steadily over the sleeping sea.

## **Chapter Six.**

### **Changes in Wind and Weather Produce Changes in Temper and Feeling—Land Discovered, and Freydisa Becomes Inquisitive**

There are few things that impress one more at sea than the rapidity of the transitions which frequently take place in the aspect and the condition of vessel, sea, and sky. At one time all may be profoundly tranquil on board; then, perhaps, the necessity for going “about ship” arises, and all is bustle; ropes rattle, blocks clatter and chirp, yards creak, and seamen’s feet stamp on the deck, while their voices aid their hands in the hauling of ropes; and soon all is quiet as before. Or, perhaps, the transition is effected by a squall, and it becomes more thorough and lasting. One moment everything in nature is hushed under the influence of what is appropriately enough termed a “dead calm.” In a few seconds a cloud-bank appears on the horizon and one or two cats-paws are seen shooting over the water. A few minutes more and the sky is clouded, the glassy sea is ruffled, the pleasant light sinks into a dull leaden grey, the wind whistles over the ocean, and we are—as far as feeling is concerned—transported into another, but by no means a better, world.

Thus it was with our adventurers. The beautiful night merged into a “dirty” morning, the calm into a breeze so stiff as to be almost a gale, and when Olaf came out of the cabin, holding tight to the weather-bulwarks to prevent himself from being thrown into the lee-scutters, his inexperienced heart sank within him at the dreary prospect of the grey sky and the black heaving sea.

But young Olaf came of a hardy seafaring race. He kept his feelings to himself; and staggered toward Karlsefin, who still stood at his post. Olaf thought he had been there all night, but the truth was that he had been relieved by Biarne, had taken a short nap, and returned to the helm.

Karlsefin was now clad in a rough-weather suit. He wore a pair of untanned sealskin boots and a cap of the same material, that bore a strong resemblance in shape and colour to the sou’-westers of the present day, and his rough heavy coat, closed up to the chin, was in texture and form not unlike to the pilot-cloth jackets of modern seamen—only it had tags and loops instead of buttons and button-holes. With his legs wide apart, he stood at the tiller, round which there was a single turn of a rope from the weather-bulwarks to steady it and himself. The boy was clad in miniature costume of much the same cut and kind, and proud was he to stagger about the deck with his little legs ridiculously wide apart, in imitation of Thorward and Biarne, both of whom were there, and had, he observed, a tendency to straddle.

“Come hither, Olaf; and learn a little seamanship,” said Karlsefin, with a good-humoured smile.

Olaf said he would be glad to do that, and made a run towards the tiller, but a heavy plunge of the ship caused him to sheer off in quite a different direction, and another lurch would have sent him head-foremost against the lee-bulwarks had not Biarne, with a laugh, caught him by the nape of the neck and set him against Karlsefin’s left leg, to which he clung with remarkable tenacity.

“Ay, hold on tight to that, boy,” said the leg’s owner, “and you’ll be safe. A few days will put you on your sea-legs, lad, and then you won’t want to hold on.”

“Always hold your head up, Olaf, when you move about aboard ship in rough weather,” said Biarne, pausing a minute in his perambulation of the deck to give the advice, “and look overboard, or up, or away at the horizon—anywhere except at your feet. You can’t see how the ship’s going to roll, you know, if you keep looking down at the deck.”

Olaf acted on this advice at once, and then began to question Karlsefin in regard to many nautical matters which it is not necessary to set down here, while Biarne and Thorward leaned on the bulwarks and looked somewhat anxiously to windward.

Already two reefs of the huge sail had been taken in, and Biarne now suggested that it would be wise to take in another.

“Let it be done,” said Karlsefin.

Thorward ordered the men to reef; and the head of the ship was brought up to the wind so as to empty the sail while this was being done.

Before it was quite accomplished some of the women had assembled on the poop.

“This is not pleasant weather,” observed Gudrid, as she stood holding on to her husband.

“We must not expect to have it all plain sailing in these seas,” replied Karlsefin; “but the dark days will make the bright ones seem all the brighter.”

Gudrid smiled languidly at this, but made no reply.

Freydissa, who scorned to receive help from man, had vigorously laid hold of the bulwarks and gradually worked her way aft. She appeared to be very much out of sorts—as indeed all the women were. There was a greenish colour about the parts of their cheeks that ought to have been rosy, and a whitey blue or frosted appearance at the points of their noses, which damaged the beauty of the prettiest among them. Freydissa became positively plain—and she knew it, which did not improve her temper. Astrid, though fair and exceedingly pretty by nature, had become alarmingly white; and Thora, who was dark, had become painfully yellow. Poor Bertha, too, had a washed-out appearance, though nothing in the way of lost colour or otherwise could in the least detract from the innocent sweetness of her countenance. She did not absolutely weep, but, being cold, sick, and in a state of utter wretchedness, she had fallen into a condition of chronic whimpering, which exceedingly exasperated Freydissa. Bertha was one of those girls who are regarded by *some* of their own sex with a species of mild contempt, but who are nevertheless looked upon with much tenderness by men, which perhaps makes up to them for this to some extent. Gudrid was the least affected among them all by that dire malady, which appears to have been as virulent in the tenth as it is in the nineteenth century, and must have come in with the Flood, if not before it.

“Why don’t you go below,” said Freydissa testily, “instead of shivering up here?”

“I get so sick below,” answered Bertha, endeavouring to brighten up, “that I thought it better to try what fresh air would do for me.”

“H’m! it doesn’t appear to do much for you,” retorted Freydissa.

As she spoke a little spray broke over the side of the ship and fell on the deck near them. Karlsefin had great difficulty in preventing this, for a short cross-sea was running, and it was only by dint of extremely good and careful steering that he kept the poop-deck dry. In a few minutes a little more spray flew inboard, and some of it striking Bertha on the head ran down her shoulders. Karlsefin was much grieved at this, but Freydissa laughed heartily.

Instead of making Bertha worse, however, the shock had the effect of doing her a little good, and she laughed in a half-pitiful way as she ran down below to dry herself.

“It serves you right,” cried Freydissa as she passed; “I wish you had got more of it.”

Now Karlsefin was a man whose temper was not easily affected, and he seldom or never took offence at anything done or said to himself; but the unkindness of Freydissa’s speech to poor Bertha nettled him greatly.

“Get behind me, Gudrid,” he said quickly.

Gudrid obeyed, wondering at the stern order, and Karlsefin gave a push to the tiller with his leg. Next moment a heavy sea struck the side of the ship, burst over the bulwarks, completely overwhelmed Freydissa, and swept the deck fore and aft—wetting every one more or less except Gudrid, who had been almost completely sheltered behind her husband. A sail which had been spread over the waist of the ship prevented much damage being done to the men, and of course all the water that fell on the forecastle and poop ran out at the scupper-holes.

This unexpected shower-bath at once cleared the poop of the women. Fortunately Thora and Astrid had been standing to leeward of Biarne and Thorward, and had received comparatively little

of the shower, but Freydisa went below with streaming hair and garments,—as Biarne remarked,—like an elderly mermaid!

“You must have been asleep when that happened,” said Thorward to Karlsefin in surprise.

“He must have been sleeping, then, with his eyes open,” said Biarne, with an amused look.

Karlsefin gazed sternly towards the ship’s head, and appeared to be attending with great care to the helm, but there was a slight twinkle in his eye as he said— “Well, it *was* my intention to wash the decks a little, but more spray came inboard than I counted on. ’Tis as dangerous to play with water, sometimes, as with fire.”

“There is truth in that,” said Biarne, laughing; “and I fear that this time water will be found to have kindled fire, for when Freydisa went below she looked like the smoking mountain of Iceland—as if there was something hot inside and about to boil up.”

Karlsefin smiled, but made no reply, for the gale was increasing every moment, and the management of the ship soon required the earnest attention of all the seamen on board.

Fortunately it was a short-lived gale. When it had passed away and the sea had returned to something like its former quiescent state, and the sun had burst through and dissipated the grey clouds, our female voyagers returned to the deck and to their wonted condition of health.

Soon after that they came in sight of land.

“Now, Biarne,” said Karlsefin, after the look-out on the forecastle had shouted “Land ho!” “come, give me your opinion of this new land that we have made.—Do you mind the helm, Thorward, while we go to the ship’s head.”

The two went forward, and on the forecastle they found Olaf; flushed with excitement, and looking as if something had annoyed him.

“Ho, Olaf! you’re not sorry to see land, are you?” said Biarne.

“Sorry! no, not I; but I’m sorry to be cheated of my due.”

“How so, boy?”

“Why, *I* discovered the land first, and that fellow there,” pointing to the man on look-out, “shouted before me.”

“But why did you not shout before *him*?” asked Karlsefin, as he and Biarne surveyed the distant land with keen interest.

“Just because he took me unawares,” replied the boy indignantly. “When I saw it I did not wish to be hasty. It might have turned out to be a cloud, or a fog-bank, and I might have given a false alarm; so I pointed it out to him, and asked what he thought; but instead of answering me he gaped with his ugly mouth and shouted ‘Land ho!’ I could have kicked him.”

“Nay, Olaf; that is not well said,” observed Karlsefin, very gravely; “if you *could* have kicked him you *would* have kicked him. Why did you not do it?”

“Because he is too big for me,” answered the boy promptly.

“So, then, thy courage is only sufficient to make thee kick those who are small enough,” returned Karlsefin, with a frown. “Perhaps if you were as big as he you would be afraid to kick him.”

“That would not I,” retorted Olaf.

“It is easy for you to say that, boy, when you know that he *would* not strike you now, and that there is small chance of your meeting again after you have grown up to prove the truth of what you say. It is mere boasting, Olaf; and, mark me, you will never be a brave man if you begin by being a boastful boy. A truly brave and modest man—for modesty and bravery are wont to consort together—never says he will strike until he sees it to be right to do so. Sometimes he does not even go the length of speaking at all, but, in any case, having made up his mind to strike, he strikes at once, without more ado, let the consequences be what they will. But in my opinion it is best not to strike at all. Do you know, Olaf; my boy, some of the bravest men I ever knew have never struck a blow since they came to manhood, excepting, of course, when compelled to do so in battle; and *then* they struck such blows as made shields and helmets fly, and strewed the plain with their foes.”



“Did these men never boast when they were boys?” asked Olaf; with a troubled air.

Karlsefin relaxed into a smile as he said, “Only when they were very little boys, and very foolish; but they soon came to see how contemptible it is to threaten and not perform; so they gave up threatening, and when performance came to be necessary they found that threats were needless. Now, Olaf, I want you to be a bold, brave man, and I must lull you through the foolish boasting period as quickly as possible, therefore I tell you these things. Think on them, my boy.”

Olaf was evidently much relieved by the concluding remarks. While Karlsefin was speaking he had felt ashamed of himself; because he was filled with admiration of the magnificent skipper, and wanted to stand well in his opinion. It was therefore no small comfort to find that his boasting had been set down to his foolishness, and that there was good reason to hope he might ultimately grow out of it.

But Olaf had much more of the true metal in him than he himself was aware of. Without saying a word about it, he resolved not to wait for the result of this slow process of growth, but to jump, vault, or fly out of the boastful period of life, by hook or by crook, and that without delay. And he succeeded! Not all at once, of course. He had many a slip; but he persevered, and finally got out of it much sooner than would have been the case if he had not taken any trouble to think about the matter, or to *try*.

Meanwhile, however, he looked somewhat crestfallen. This being observed by the look-out, that worthy was prompted to say—“I’m sure, Olaf; you are welcome to kick me if that will comfort you, but there is no occasion to do so, because I claim not the honour of first *seeing* the land—and if I had known the state of your mind I would willingly have let you give the hail.”

“You may have been first to discover it at this time, Olaf;” said Biarne, turning round after he had made up his mind about it, “and no doubt you were, since the look-out admits it; nevertheless this is the land that I discovered twenty years ago. But we shall make it out more certainly in an hour or two if this breeze holds.”

The breeze did hold, and soon they were close under the land.

“Now am I quite certain of it,” said Biarne, as he stood on the poop, surrounded by all his friends, who gazed eagerly at the shore, to which they had approached so close that the rocks and bushes were distinctly visible; “that is the very same land which I saw before.”

“What, Vinland?” asked Freydissa.

“Nay, not Vinland. Are you so eager to get at the grapes that ye think the first land we meet is Vinland?”

“A truce to your jesting, Biarne; what land is it?”

“It is the land I saw *last* when leaving this coast in search of Greenland, so that it seems not unnatural to find it *first* on coming back to it. Leif; on his voyage, went on shore here. He named it Helloland, which, methinks, was a fitting name, for it is, as you see, a naked land of rocks.”

“Now, then,” said Karlsefin, “lower the sail, heave out the anchor, and let two men cast loose the little boat. Some of us will land and see what we shall see; for it must not be said of us, Biarne, as it was unfairly said of you, that we took no interest in these new regions.”

The little boat was got ready. The Scottish brothers, Hake and Heika, were appointed to row. Karlsefin, Biarne, Thorward, Gudrid, Freydissa, and Olaf embarked and proceeded to the shore.

This land, on which the party soon stood, was not of an inviting aspect. It was sterile, naked, and very rocky, as Biarne had described it, and not a blade of grass was to be seen. There was a range of high snow-capped mountains in the interior, and all the way from the coast up to these mountains the land was covered with snow. In truth, a more forbidding spot could not easily have been found, even in Greenland.

“It seems to me,” said Freydissa, “that your new land is but a sorry place—worse than that we have left. I wonder at your landing here. It is plain that men see with flushed eyes when they look

upon their own discoveries. Cold comfort is all we shall get in this place. I counsel that we return on board immediately.”

“You are too hasty, sister,” said Gudrid.

“Oh! of course, always too hasty,” retorted Freydisa sharply.

“And somewhat too bitter,” growled Thorward, with a frown.

Thorward was not an ill-natured man, but his wife’s sharp temper tried him a good deal.

“Your interrupting me before you heard all I had to say *proves* you to be too hasty, sister,” said Gudrid, with a playful laugh. “I was about to add that it seems we have come here rather early in the spring. Who knows but the land may wear a prettier dress when the mantle of winter is gone? Even Greenland looks green and bright in summer.”

“Not in those places where the snow lies *all* the summer,” objected Olaf.

“That’s right, Olaf;” said Biarne; “stick up for your sweet aunt. She often takes a stick up for you, lad, and deserves your gratitude.—But come, let’s scatter and survey the land, for, be it good or bad, we must know what it is, and carry with us some report such as Karlsefin may weave into his rhymes.”

“This land would be more suitable for your rhymes, Biarne, than for mine,” said Karlsefin, as they started off together, “because it is most dismal.”

After that the whole party scattered. The three leaders ascended the nearest heights in different directions, and Gudrid with Olaf went searching among the rocks and pools to ascertain what sort of creatures were to be found there, while Freydisa sat down and sulked upon a rock. She soon grew tired of sulking, however, and, looking about her, observed the brothers, who had been left in charge of the boat, standing as if engaged in earnest conversation.

She had not before this paid much attention to these brothers, and was somewhat struck with their appearance, for, as we have said before, they were good specimens of men. Hake, the younger of the two, had close-curling auburn hair, and bright blue eyes. His features were not exactly handsome, but the expression of his countenance was so winning that people were irresistibly attracted by it. The elder brother, Heika, was very like him, but not so attractive in his appearance. Both were fully six feet high, and though thin, as has been said, their limbs were beautifully moulded, and they possessed much greater strength than most people gave them credit for. In aspect, thought, and conversation, they were naturally grave, and very earnest; nevertheless, they could be easily roused to mirth.

Going up to them, Freydisa said— “Ye seem to have earnest talk together.”

“We have,” answered Heika. “Our talk is about home.”

“I am told that your home is in the Scottish land,” said Freydisa.

“It is,” answered Hake, with a kindling eye.

“How come you to be so far from home?” asked Freydisa.

“We were taken prisoners two years ago by vikings from Norway, when visiting our father in a village near the Forth fiord.”

“How did that happen? Come, tell me the story; but, first, who is your father?”

“He is an earl of Scotland,” said Heika.

“Ha! and I suppose ye think a Scottish earl is better than a Norse king?”

Heika smiled as he replied, “I have never thought of making a comparison between them.”

“Well—how were you taken?”

“We were, as I have said, on a visit to our father, who dwelt sometimes in a small village on the shores of the Forth, for the sake of bathing in the sea—for he is sickly. One night, while we slept, a Norse long-ship came to land. Those who should have been watching slumbered. The Norsemen surrounded my father’s house without awaking anyone, and, entering by a window which had not been securely fastened, overpowered Hake and me before we knew where we were. We struggled hard, but what could two unarmed men do among fifty? The noise we made, however, roused the village and prevented the vikings from discovering our father’s room, which was on the upper floor.

They had to fight their way back to the ship, and lost many men on the road, but they succeeded in carrying us two on board, bound with cords. They took us over the sea to Norway. There we became slaves to King Olaf Tryggvissón, by whom, as you know, we were sent to Leif Ericsson."

"No doubt ye think," said Freydisa, "that if you had not been caught sleeping ye would have given the Norsemen some trouble to secure you."

They both laughed at this.

"We have had some thoughts of that kind," said Hake brightly, "but truly we did give them some trouble even as it was."

"I knew it," cried the dame rather sharply; "the conceit of you men goes beyond all bounds! Ye always boast of what valiant deeds you *would* have done *if* something or other had been in your favour."

"We made no boast," replied Heika gravely.

"If you did not speak it, ye thought it, I doubt not.—But, tell me, is your land as good a land as Norway?"

"We love it better," replied Heika.

"But *is* it better?" asked Freydisa.

"We would rather dwell in it than in Norway," said Hake.

"We hope not. But we would prefer to be in our own land," replied the elder brother, sadly, "for there is no place like home."

At this point Karlsefin and the rest of the party came back to the shore and put an end to the conversation. Returning on board they drew up the anchor, hoisted sail, and again put out to sea.

## Chapter Seven.

### Songs and Sagas—Vinland at Last!

In days of old, just as in modern times, tars, when at sea, were wont to assemble on the “fo’c’sle,” or forecastle, and spin yarns—as we have seen—when the weather was fine and their work was done.

One sunny afternoon, on the forecastle of Karlsefin’s ship—which, by the way, was called “*The Snake*,” and had a snake’s head and neck for a figure-head—there was assembled a group of seamen, among whom were Tyrker the Turk, one of Thorward’s men named Swend, who was very stout and heavy, and one of Karlsefin’s men called Krake, who was a wild jocular man with a peculiar twang in his speech, the result of having been long a prisoner in Ireland. We mention these men particularly, because it was they who took the chief part in conversations and in story-telling. The two Scots were also there, but they were very quiet, and talked little; nevertheless, they were interested and attentive listeners. Olaf was there also, all eyes and ears,—for Olaf drank in stories, and songs, and jests, as the sea-sand drinks water—so said Tyrker; but Krake immediately contradicted him, saying that when the sea-sand was full of water it drank no more, as was plain from the fact that it did not drink up the sea, whereas Olaf went on drinking and was *never* satisfied.

“Come, sing us a song, Krake,” cried Tyrker, giving the former a slap on the shoulder; “let us hear how the Danish kings were served by the Irish boys.”

“Not I,” said Krake, firmly. “I’ve told ye two stories already. It’s Hake’s turn now to give us a song, or what else he pleases.”

“But you’ll sing it after Hake has sung, won’t you, Krake?” pleaded several of the men.

“I’ll not say ‘No’ to that.”

Hake, who possessed a soft and deep bass voice of very fine quality, at once acceded to the request for a song. Crossing his arms on his chest, and looking, as if in meditation, towards the eastern horizon, he sang, to one of his national airs, “The Land across the Sea.”

The deep pathos of Hake’s voice, more than the words, melted these hardy Norsemen almost to tears, and for a few minutes effectually put to flight the spirit of fun that had prevailed.

“That’s your own composin’, I’ll be bound,” said Krake, “an’ sure it’s not bad. It’s Scotland you mean, no doubt, by the land across the sea. Ah! I’ve heard much of that land. The natives are very fond of it, they say. It must be a fine country. I’ve heard Irishmen, who have been there, say that if it wasn’t for Ireland they’d think it the finest country in the world.”

“No doubt,” answered Hake with a laugh, “and I dare say Swend, there, would think it the finest country in the world after Norway.”

“Ha! Gamle Norge,” (Old Norway) said Swend with enthusiasm, “there is no country like *that* under the sun.”

“Except Greenland,” said Olaf, stoutly.

“Or Iceland,” observed Biarne, who had joined the group. “Where can you show such mountains—spouting fire, and smoke, and melted stones,—or such boiling fountains, ten feet thick and a hundred feet high, as we have in Iceland?”

“That’s true,” observed Krake, who was an Iclander.

“Oh!” exclaimed Tyrker, with a peculiar twist of his ugly countenance, “Turkey is the land that beats all others completely.”

At this there was a general laugh.

“Why, how can that be?” cried Swend, who was inclined to take up the question rather hotly. “What have you to boast of in Turkey?”

“Eh! What have we *not*, is the question. What shall I say? Ha! we have *grapes* there; and we do make *such* a drink of them—Oh!—”

Here Tyrker screwed his face and figure into what was meant for a condition of ecstasy.

“Twere well that they had no grapes there, Tyrker,” said Biarne, “for if all be true that Karlsefin tells us of that drink, they would be better without it.”

“I wish I had it!” remarked Tyrker, pathetically.

“Well, it is said that we shall find grapes in Vinland,” observed Swend, “and as we are told there is everything else there that man can desire, our new country will beat all the others put together, —so hurrah for Vinland!”

The cheer was given with right good-will, and then Tyrker reminded Krake of his promise to sing a song. Krake, whose jovial spirits made him always ready for anything, at once struck up to a rattling ditty:—

### **The Danish Kings**

One night when one o’ the Irish Kings  
Was sleeping in his bed,  
Six Danish Kings—so Sigvat sings—  
Came an’ cut off his head.  
The Irish boys they heard the noise,  
And flocked unto the shore;  
They caught the kings, and put out their eyes,  
And left them in their gore.

*Chorus*—Oh! this is the way we served the kings,  
An’ spoiled their pleasure, the dirty things,  
When they came to harry and flap their wings  
Upon the Irish shore-ore,  
Upon the Irish shore.

Next year the Danes took terrible pains  
To wipe that stain away;  
They came with a fleet, their foes to meet,  
Across the stormy say.  
Each Irish carl great stones did hurl  
In such a mighty rain,  
The Danes went down, with a horrible stoun,  
An’ never came up again!

Oh! this is the way, etcetera.

The men were still laughing and applauding Krake’s song when Olaf, who chanced to look over the bow of the vessel, started up and shouted “Land, ho!” in a shrill voice, that rang through the whole ship.

Instantly, the poop and forecastle were crowded, and there, on the starboard bow, they saw a faint blue line of hills far away on the horizon. Olaf got full credit for having discovered the land first on this occasion; and for some time everything else was forgotten in speculations as to what this new land would turn out to be; but the wind, which had been getting lighter every hour that day, died away almost to a calm, so that, as there was no prospect of reaching the land for some hours, the men gradually fell back to their old places and occupation.

“Now, then, Krake,” said Tyrker, “tell us the story about that king you were talking of the other day; which was it? Harald—”

“Ay, King Harald,” said Krake, “and how he came to get the name of Greyskin. Well, you must know that it’s not many years ago since my father, Sigurd, was a trader between Iceland and Norway. He went to other places too, sometimes—and once to Ireland, on which occasion it was that I was taken prisoner and kept so long in the country, that I became an Irishman. But after escaping and getting home I managed to change back into an Icelander, as ye may see! Well, in my father’s younger days, before I was born—which was a pity! for he needed help sorely at that time, and I would have been just the man to turn myself handy to any sort of work; however, it wasn’t *my* fault,—in his younger days, my father one summer went over from Iceland to Norway,—his ship loaded till she could hardly float, with skins and peltry, chiefly grey wolves. It’s my opinion that the reason she didn’t go down was that they had packed her so tight there was no room for the water to get in and sink her. Anyway, over the sea she went and got safe to Norway.

“At that time King Harald, one of the sons of Eric, reigned in Norway, after the death of King Hakon the Good. He and my father were great friends, but they had not met for some time; and not since Harald had come to his dignity. My father sailed to Hardanger, intending to dispose of his pelts there if he could. Now, King Harald generally had his seat in Hordaland and Bogaland, and some of his brothers were usually with him; but it chanced that year that they went to Hardanger, so my father and the king met, and had great doings, drinking beer and talking about old times when they were boys together.

“My father then went to the place where the greatest number of people were met in the fiord, but nobody would buy any of his skins. He couldn’t understand this at all, and was very much annoyed at it, and at night when he was at supper with the king he tells him about it. The king was in a funny humour that night. He had dashed his beard with beer to a great extent, and laughed heartily sometimes without my father being able to see what was the joke. But my father was a knowing man. He knew well enough that people are sometimes given to hearty laughter without troubling themselves much about the joke—especially when they are beery,—so he laughed too, out of friendliness, and was very sociable.

“When my father went away the king promised to pay him a visit on board of his ship next day, which he did, sure enough; and my father took care to let it be known that he was coming, so there was no lack of the principal people thereabouts. They had all come down together, by the merest chance, to the place where the ship lay, just to enjoy the fresh air—being fresher there that day than at most other places on the fiord, no doubt!

“King Harald came with a fully-manned boat, and a number of followers. He was very condescending and full of fun, as he had been the night before. When he was going away he looked at the skins, and said to my father, ‘Wilt thou give me a present of one of these wolf-skins?’

“‘Willingly,’ says my father, ‘and as many more as you please.’

“On this, the king wrapped himself up in a wolf-skin and went back to his boat and rowed away. Immediately after, all the boats in his suite came alongside and looked at the wolf-skins with great admiration, and every man bought just such another wolf-skin as the king had got. In a few days so many people came to buy skins, that not half of them could be served with what they wanted, and the upshot was that my father’s vessel was cleared out down to the keel, and thereafter the king went, as you know, by the name of Harald Greyskin.

“But here we are, comrades,” continued Krake, rising, “drawing near to the land,—I’ll have a look at it.”

The country off which they soon cast anchor was flat and overgrown with wood; and the strand far around consisted of white sand, and was very low towards the sea. Biarne said that it was the country to which Leif had given the name of Markland, because it was well-wooded; they therefore went ashore in the small boat, but finding nothing in particular to attract their interest, they soon

returned on board and again put to sea with an onshore wind from the north-east. (Some antiquaries appear to be of opinion that Helloland must have been Newfoundland, and Markland some part of Nova Scotia.)

For two days they continued their voyage with the same wind, and then made land for the third time and found it to be an island. It was blowing hard at the time, and Biarne advised that they should take shelter there and wait for good weather. This they did, and, as before, a few of them landed to explore the country, but there was not much to take note of. Little Olaf, who was one of the explorers, observed dew on the grass, and, remembering that Leif had said that the dew on one of the islands which he met with was *sweet*, he shook some into the hollow of his hand and tasted it, but looked disappointed.

“Are you thirsty, Olaf?” asked Karlsefin, who, with Biarne, walked beside him.

“No, but I wondered if the dew would be sweet. My father said it was, on one of the islands he came to.”

“Foolish boy,” said Biarne, laughing; “Leif did but speak in a figure. He was very hot and tired at the time, and found the dew sweet to his thirsty spirit as well as refreshing to his tongue.”

“Thus you see, Olaf,” observed Karlsefin, with a sly look at Biarne, “whenever you chance to observe your father getting angry, and hear him say that his beer is sour, you are not to suppose that it is really sour, but must understand that it is only sour to his cross spirit as well as disagreeable to his tongue.”

Olaf received this with a loud laugh, for, though he was puzzled for a moment by Biarne’s explanation, he saw through the jest at once.

“Well, Biarne,” returned Olaf; “whether the dew was sweet to my father’s tongue or to his spirit I cannot tell, but I remember that when he told us about the sweet dew, he said it was near to the island where he found it that the country he called Vinland lay. So, if this be the sweet-dew island, Vinland cannot be far off.”

“The boy is sharp beyond his years,” said Karlsefin, stopping abruptly and looking at Biarne; “what thinkest thou of that?”

“I think,” replied the other, “that Olaf will be a great discoverer some day, for it seems to me not unlikely that he may be right.”

“Come, we shall soon see,” said Karlsefin, turning round and hastening back to the boat.

Biarne either had not seen this particular spot on his former visit to these shores, which is quite probable, or he may have forgotten it, for he did not recognise it as he had done the first land they made; but before they left Ericsfiord, Leif had given them a very minute and careful description of the appearance of the coast of Vinland, especially of that part of it where he had made good his landing and set up his booths, so that the explorers might be in a position to judge correctly when they should approach it. Nevertheless, as every one knows, regions, even when well defined, may wear very different aspects when seen by different people, for the first time, from different points of view. So it was on this occasion. The voyagers had hit the island a short distance further south than the spot where Leif came upon it, and did not recognise it in the least. Indeed they had begun to doubt whether it really was an island at all. But now that Olaf had awakened their suspicions, they hastened eagerly on board the “*Snake*,” and sailed round the coast until they came into a sound which lay between the Island and a cape that jutted out northward from the land.

“’Tis Vinland!” cried Biarne in an excited tone.

“Don’t be too sure of that,” said Thorward, as a sudden burst of sunshine lit up land and sea.

“I cannot be too sure,” cried Biarne, pointing to the land. “See, there is the ness that Leif spoke of going out northwards from the land; there is the island; here, between it and the ness, is the sound, and yonder, doubtless, is the mouth of the river which comes out of the lake where the son of Eric built his booths. Ho! Vinland! hurrah!” he shouted, enthusiastically waving his cap above his head.

The men were not slow to echo his cheer, and they gave it forth not a whit less heartily.

“Tis a noble land to look upon,” said Gudrid, who with the other females of the party had been for some time gazing silently and wistfully towards it.

“Perchance it may be a *great* land some day,” observed Karlsefin.

“Who knows?” murmured Thorward in a contemplative tone.

“Ay, who knows?” echoed Biarne; “time and luck can work wonders.”

“God’s blessing can work wonders,” said Karlsefin, impressively; “may He grant it to us while we sojourn here!”

With that he gave orders to prepare to let go the anchor, but the sound, over which they were gliding slowly before a light wind, was very shallow, and he had scarcely ceased speaking when the ship struck with considerable violence, and remained fast upon the sand.



## Chapter Eight.

### A Chapter of Incidents and Exploration, in which a Bear and a Whale Play Prominent Parts

Although arrested thus suddenly and unexpectedly in their progress toward the shore, these resolute Norsemen were not to be balked in their intention of reaching the land that forenoon—for it was morning when the vessel stuck fast on the shallows.

The tide was ebbing at the time, so that Karlsefin knew it would be impossible to get the ship off again until the next flood-tide. He therefore waited till the water was low enough, and then waded to the land accompanied by a large band of men. We need scarcely say that they were well-armed. In those days men never went abroad either by land or sea without their armour, which consisted of swords, axes, spears and bows for offence, with helmets and shields for defence. Some of the men of wealth and position also wore defensive armour on their breasts, thighs, and shins, but most of the fighting men were content to trust to the partial protection afforded by tunics of thick skin.

They were not long of reaching the mouth of the river which Biarne had pointed out, and, after proceeding up its banks for a short distance, were convinced that this must be the very spot they were in search of.

“Now, Biarne,” said Karlsefin, stopping and sitting down on a large stone, “I have no doubt that this is Leif’s river, for it is broad and deep as he told us, therefore we will take our ship up here. Nevertheless, before doing so, it would be a satisfaction to make positively certain that we are in the right way, and this we may do by sending one or two of our men up into the land, who, by following the river, will come to the lake where Leif built his booths, and so bring us back the news of them. Meanwhile we can explore the country here till they return.”

Biarne and Thorward thought this advice good, and both offered to lead the party to be sent there.

“For,” said Thorward, “they may meet with natives, and if the natives here bear any resemblance to the Skraelingers, methinks they won’t receive us with much civility.”

“I have thought of that,” returned Karlsefin with a smile, “but I like not your proposal. What good would it do that either you or Biarne should lead so small a party if ye were assaulted by a hundred or more savages, as might well be the case?”

“Why, we could at all events retreat fighting,” retorted Thorward in a slightly offended tone.

“With fifty, perhaps, in front, to keep you in play, and fifty detached to tickle you in rear.”

Thorward laughed at this, and so did Biarne. “Well, if the worst came to the worst,” said the latter, “we could at any rate sell our lives dearly.”

“And, pray, what good would that do to *us*?” demanded Karlsefin.

“Well, well, have it your own way, skipper,” said Biarne; “it seems to me, nevertheless, that if we were to advance with the whole of the men we have brought on shore with us, we should be in the same predicament, for twenty men could not easily save themselves from a hundred—or, as it might be, a thousand—if surrounded in the way you speak of.”

“Besides that,” added Thorward, “it seems to me a mean thing to send out only one or two of our men without a leader to cope with such possible dangers, unless indeed they were possessed of more than mortal powers.”

“Why, what has become of your memories, my friends?” exclaimed Karlsefin. “Are there none of our men possessed of powers that are, at all events, more than those of *ordinary* mortals?”

“O-ho! Hake and Heika! I forgot them,” cried Biarne; “the very men for the work, to be sure!”

“No doubt of it,” said Karlsefin. “If they meet with natives who are friendly, well and good; if they meet with no natives at all,—better. If they meet with unfriendly natives, they can show them

their heels; and I warrant you that, unless the natives here be different from most other men, the best pair of savage legs in Vinland will fail to overtake the Scottish brothers.”

Thorward agreed that this was a good plan, but cautioned Karlsefin to give the brothers strict injunctions to fly, and not upon any account to fight; “for,” said he, “these doughty Scots are fiery and fierce when roused, and from what I have seen of them will, I think, be much more disposed to use their legs in running after their foes than in running away from them.”

This having been settled, the brothers were called, and instructed to proceed into the woods and up the bank of the river as quickly as possible, until they should come to a lake on the margin of which they would probably see a few small huts. On discovering these they were to turn immediately and hasten back. They were also particularly cautioned as to their behaviour in the event of meeting with natives, and strictly forbidden to fight, if these should be evil disposed, but to run back at full speed to warn their friends, so that they might be prepared for any emergency.

“Nevertheless,” said Karlsefin, in conclusion, “ye may carry weapons with you if ye will.”

“Thanks,” replied Heika. “As, however, you appear to doubt our powers of self-restraint, we will relieve your mind by going without them.”

Thus instructed and warned, the brothers tightened their belts, and, leaping nimbly into the neighbouring brake, disappeared from view.

“A pair of proper men,” said Karlsefin.—“And now, comrades, we will explore the neighbourhood together, for it is advisable to ascertain all we can of the nature of our new country, and that as quickly as may be. It is needful, also, to do so without scattering, lest we be set upon unexpectedly by any lurking foe. This land is not easily surveyed like Iceland or Greenland, being, as you see, covered with shrubs and trees, which somewhat curtail our vision, and render caution the more necessary.”

While the Norsemen were engaged in examining the woods near the coast, the two Scots held on their way into the interior. There was something absolutely exhilarating, as Krake once remarked, in the mere beholding of these brothers’ movements. They had been famed for agility and endurance even in their own country. They did not run, but trotted lightly, and appeared to be going at a moderate pace, when in reality it would have compelled an ordinary runner to do his best to keep up with them. Yet they did not pant or show any other symptom of distress. On the contrary, they conversed occasionally in quiet tones, as men do when walking. They ran abreast as often as the nature of the ground would allow them to do so, taking their leaps together when they came to small obstructions, such as fallen trees or brooks of a few feet wide; but when they came to creeks of considerable width, the one usually paused to see the other spring over, and then followed him.

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